

VZCZCXRO6268  
PP RUEHTRO  
DE RUEHTU #0645/01 2441658  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 011658Z SEP 09  
FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6744  
INFO RUCNMGH/MAGHREB COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHKH/AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM PRIORITY  
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV PRIORITY 3276  
RUEHDE/AMCONSUL DUBAI PRIORITY 0166  
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY 3388

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TUNIS 000645

SIPDIS

NEA/MAG (MHAYES), NEA/IPA (JGIAUQUE), NEA/IR, AF/SPG  
DUBAI FOR IRPO  
STATE ALSO FOR H  
LONDON AND PARIS FOR NEA WATCHER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/03/2019  
TAGS: [OREP](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [PTER](#) [TS](#)  
SUBJECT: FM ABDALLAH ON MIDDLE EAST PEACE, IRAN, SUDAN, AND  
TERRORISM

REF: A. TUNIS 585  
[1](#)B. STATE 87407

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Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Marc L. Desjardins for reasons 1.4 (b)  
and (d)

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Summary  
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[1](#)1. (C) Tunisian Foreign Minister Abdallah told CODEL Meeks (led by Representative Gregory Meeks (D-NY), including Representatives Mel Watt (D-NC), Jack Kingston (R-GA), Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX), and Marcia Fudge (D-OH)), during an August 29 meeting that Tunisia strongly supported President Obama's approach on the Middle East Peace Process but complained that Israel was not fulfilling its obligations following the 2007 Annapolis conference. Abdallah further charged that Israel was using international concerns about Iran to divert attention from its inaction on the process with the Palestinians (though he acknowledged that Iran posed a genuine danger). Acknowledging that Mauritania remained a weak link in the region's efforts to combat the terrorist threat posed by Al-Qaida in the Maghreb (AQIM), Abdallah praised the recent elections there and was cautiously optimistic of a positive trend in that corner of the Sahel. On Sudan, Abdallah reiterated the GOT's support for Khartoum and African Union efforts to stabilize Darfur. End Summary.

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GOT Views on Middle East Peace, Iran  
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[1](#)2. (C) Welcoming Congressman Meeks and his delegation to Tunisia, Foreign Minister Abdallah opened with a lengthy monologue. Abdallah enthusiastically praised President Obama for his June speech in Cairo, opining that it "reestablished certain truths." Abdallah told the delegation that he had enjoyed hosting Special Envoy Mitchell and looked forward to a visit from Secretary Clinton to Tunisia. On the Middle East Peace Process, he told the delegation that Tunisia supports the efforts of the new Administration to bring about a two-state solution. He said Israel had agreed to certain actions in the 2007 Annapolis Conference, such as adopting the roadmap and freezing settlements, but then had not complied. FM Abdallah said the GOT believes it is necessary for Israel to provide a significant, symbolic gesture (freezing the settlements) in order for the peace process to

move forward. He said it would be hard for the world to negotiate with a party it does not trust - a country which blocks borders and contributes to humanitarian problems in Palestine, he claimed.

13. (C) FM Abdallah said that Israel was exploiting international concerns about Iran to divert the attention of the world away from its own inaction on the peace process. Iran is a serious problem also, he said, but there is no link between the MEPP and Iran. Abdallah said Tunisia's position is clear: they are against nuclear proliferation in Iran. The GOT wants a negotiated discussion and solution. Abdallah said he hoped the U.S. administration and the EU would not let Israel divert their attention from the need to keep up the pressure on stopping settlements in the occupied territories. He praised the current U.S. Administration's views on settlements.

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Tunisia on the Maghreb and the Regional Terrorist Threat  
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14. (C) FM Abdallah characterized Tunisia's relations its Arab Maghreb Union neighbors as "excellent." When asked about relations with Mauritania, Abdallah said Mauritania was a close friend of Tunisia and that he followed events there. He described the recent Mauritanian elections as sincere and transparent, and said that a new page had been turned with the recently-elected president. He saw Mauritania as the weak link in the Maghreb's effort against terrorism and AQIM. However, he was optimistic that the hardest phase of the fight against AQIM had already passed.

15. (C) In the delegation's separate meeting with Prime Minister Ghannouchi, Congressman Meeks asked how the U.S. and

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Tunisia could work together to strengthen the fight against terrorism, especially against AQIM. Ghannouchi said that over the years Tunisia has acted on the causes of terrorism, removing sources of frustration by focusing on economic development. He added the GOT had worked on increasing educational opportunities, reducing poverty, and improving the quality of life for its citizens. He added, however, that the situations in the Palestinian territories, Iraq and Afghanistan were breeding grounds for terrorist activity.

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Sudan and Africa  
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16. (C) Representative Jackson Lee asked FM Abdallah about Tunisia's engagement on the Darfur issue. Abdallah said Tunisia supported the government of Sudan and outlined the GOT's policy of non-intervention in another country's sovereign affairs. He characterized Sudan's problems as "extreme" and said the GOT was lending Sudan their support through the African Union and the Arab League. He made clear that Tunisia would not get directly involved in Sudanese affairs. Abdallah also mentioned relations with sub-Saharan Africa, noting he had was receiving that day the Foreign Minister of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. He lamented that intra-African trade was weak, as it had been hampered by colonialism and weak air, ground and sea transport links.

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Tunisia's UN Voting Record  
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17. (C) Representative Kingston pointed out to FM Abdallah that Tunisia had not coincided with the United States in 13 important UNGA votes. The Foreign Minister, apparently caught off guard by the question, presumed that most of those votes had been related to Palestinian issues. He claimed that aside from Israel, Tunisia generally agrees with U.S.

positions. Abdallah also noted that Tunisia belongs to the Middle East, Africa, Non-Aligned and 77 plus China voting blocks in the UN, which heavily influence voting.

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Comment  
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18. (C) Foreign Minister Abdallah's praise for President Obama's Cairo speech was consistent with previous remarks. His remarks on the need to press Israel on settlements struck a more strident tone than he has in the past, as did his specific accusation that Israel is using the threat from Iran as a distraction. The Prime Minister's assertion that Tunisia was already addressing the issue of youth disenfranchisement and its potential as a driver for terrorism and instability was typical of the GOT's public confidence on this issue. The Foreign Minister's comments on Darfur reflected Tunisia's long standing adherence to the Arab League Consensus on Sudan, though Rep. Jackson Lee's question was a useful reminder for the Tunisians that this issue continues to have a high profile in Washington. End comment.

19. (U) CODEL Meeks did not have an opportunity to clear this cable before departing Tunisia.  
DESJARDINS